

THE WORKS OF MERCY IN AUSTIN: COMFORTING THE SICK

#54

THANK YOU for allowing me to come visit with you today I am Lynn Goodman-Strauss, and I live and work at Mary House Catholic Worker We are a small Christian community which offers **FREE housing to indigent men and women requiring a home setting as they recover from surgery or injuries or critical illnesses** (requiring iv antibiotics, for example, or chemotherapy), as well as **housing terminally ill indigent people** Mary House, or Mary's House, as many of our guests call it, is the **ONLY** such facility in Central Texas, and we save the public health care system hundreds of thousands of dollars each tax year as we house and care for upwards of 100 men and women yearly

THAT SAID, there is an obvious, and immoral, if not illegal, **ELEPHANT IN THE LIVING ROOM** right here downtown, on the streets of Austin **Often when I go downtown, I encounter people who are discharged to the streets from Brack who are very, very ill and require more rest, or machines, or medication which needs to be locked up or refrigerated.** The Sick Bays at downtown shelters cannot begin to assist these folks, as they cannot accommodate these special needs And Mary House has only 12 beds -- 12 beds in all of Travis County!

Last November, we found a man lying outside ARCH with his GI system completely shut down -- this had occurred just as he was being discharged from Brackenridge Hospital after his fourth abdominal surgery in about 6 months This young man was dehydrated and dangerously ill when we scooped him off the pavement and took him **BACK** to Brackenridge, where he endured yet another abdominal surgery before coming to Mary House **OF COURSE, SUCH NEGLECT ONLY INCREASES THE COSTS AS PEOPLE RETURN TO THE HOSPITAL WITH COMPLICATIONS!** This is not to mention the **human suffering** inflicted by such policies

Today I am here because there seems to be no other recourse for this man, Daniel Saunders, a guest at Mary House **WHEN MR. SAUNDERS was released to Mary House at 7.30 on a Friday evening in June 2006, he did not have congestive heart failure, he had congestive BODY failure!** The social worker assured me that a Brack physician had discharged Mr Saunders personally When he ran out of oxygen, Mr Saunders went by EMS to Seton Main, where he could not even be removed to ICU from the ER for several hours Since then he has been back to Seton again To this day, the public clinicians insist that he only has "sleep apnea"

Although he had a heart attack in May 2006, Mr Saunders has NOT been sent to any specialists in endocrinology or cardiology or internal medicine -- *in fact he was not even referred to a specialist until I notified his clinic in April that we would be going public with this information* All of a sudden, the nurse who signs off on these things citywide was able to take 10 minutes that very day to refer Mr Saunders to both a dietitian and a specialist -- in July and in August 2007, respectively, that's 14-15 months after his heart attack The excuses have been creative, but not convincing! -- as Mr Saunders has languished You will, however, be happy to know that the Business Office is attempting to put a lien on Mr Saunders' SSDI check for a **ONE HOUR HOSPITALIZATION THAT COST \$10,000**, which I believe also is illegal **THEY ARE VERY EFFICIENT!!**

I ask you: would you want your mother, your father, your child, your brother or sister treated this way? Is this good medicine? Is this caring for our neighbor?

Management personnel at the Hospital and in specialty clinics often are rude, indifferent, and/or just plain nasty When we request services for our friends, the managers of the clinics or parts of Brackenridge often blame the patient -- he/she did not ask the right questions, said no to help (when no explanations were offered), did not request medication soon enough! (invariably our guests have tried for over 4 working days before I get involved) This blame-game included our guest with brittle diabetes who could not get his insulin refill until I promised Mr Bruce Brosiat, the Administrator of Brackenridge (a very nice stonewaller), that I had instructed our guest to stay in his office so he could see a person in a diabetic coma or death up close and personal! (The medication was available when the man arrived at the Hospital pharmacy)

The 8-East Charge Nurse screamed that Brackenridge was HER hospital when I requested

better pain management for a very sick and very hurting patient. Although she did not do me the courtesy of saying it to me, the Director of Critical Care informed the horribly injured victim of a vicious sexual assault that I was "inappropriate" for demanding medical care for her instead of plain bed rest!

I have been around Brack for 40 years -- since my first baby was born there. In all these years, I have been working on behalf of poor people, and Brackenridge NEVER has been so poorly managed or had people just cast out on the street -- when hospital personnel know there is no room at Mary House or in the Sick Bays of shelters!

You know, ours is a Catholic Christian ministry, but I have found that EVERY religion teaches compassion and charity to the most vulnerable. Protestants, Catholics, Hindus, Jews, Muslims -- and people of good will, with no religious affiliation -- have participated in the Works of Mercy, as we call them, at Mary House and throughout the community as we Feed the Hungry, Give Drink to the Thirsty, Clothe the Naked, Visit the Prisoner, Welcome the Stranger, and **COMFORT THE SICK** (Mt 25)

I love Austin because we value diversity and remain unified in our sense of decency and fairness. WHEN IT COMES TO HEALTH CARE, I believe -- I KNOW -- we can do better by our most vulnerable brothers and sisters. HOW CAN WE COMFORT THE SICK WHEN THEY ARE SO NEGLECTED AND ENDANGERED?

I question why the past ten years have brought so much misery upon our brothers and sisters. When City Manager Jesús Garza and Mayor Bruce Todd announced to the Hospital District Committee and the rest of us that our PUBLIC hospital had been given to the most profitable healthcare organization in the country, **WITHOUT open meetings, which is illegal, WITHOUT Requests for Proposals (RFP's), or Bids, also probably illegal, -- AND in competition with Ascension (Seton) Healthcare's own hospitals here in Austin, clearly a conflict of interest** -- I could not have imagined how really horrible the public healthcare system would become.

SHAME on us all, including the press, for not asking questions, for not demanding answers, and, especially, for allowing the Daughters of Charity and their henchmen (including Mr. Garza, who has been a highly paid employee of the system since a year after his departure from the city) to have so little regard for ethical medical care that people's lives are at stake. These are people who, but for the Grace of God, could have been ourselves, or our aged parent, or our mentally ill cousin.

I HOPE YOU MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL AND THE PRESS WILL ASK THE QUESTIONS THAT NEED ANSWERING! It is one thing to give away a major asset owned by the taxpayers of Austin -- It is another to see it run into the ground by the recipients of our largesse! *We chose to involve elected officials in this matter rather than the City Manager, because she will be stonewalled and probably called names, too.* **YOU are where the buck, our buck, stops.** Mr. Saunders says he will provide releases for his medical information, to the press as well as you and the City Manager.

I appeal to you to support the City Manager and the people of Austin in finding the political will to provide a more cost-efficient and compassionate approach to healthcare for the indigent disabled, elderly, homeless, and taxpaying, citizens of Austin.

My e-mail address is theeggglady@sbcglobal.net and I welcome any comments or horror stories, or success stories for that matter. I will be back, and I encourage anyone else in the community who is concerned to come before you also, including medical personnel.

In the meantime, please, will you assist in getting some real help for Mr. Daniel Saunders?

THANK YOU!

Respectfully submitted by Lynn Goodman-Strauss from Mary House Catholic Worker
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JEREMIAH'S STUTTER

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IF JESUS CAME TO MY HOUSE...

The title of this essay also is the title of a children's book by the same name. Of course, *all* of our guests are Jesus to us, "in the distressing disguise of the poor"

However, we await our new guest, who really is named Jesus. Jesus is the same age as my elder son, the father of five children. He arrived from Guanajuato on January 18, after a harrowing trip through the mountains with a coyote who murdered three fellow travelers when they could not pay more money than the agreed price. Only three or four days after he arrived in Austin Jesus' stomach pain became so unbearable that he got himself to a local hospital, where he was diagnosed with a ruptured appendix.

It is difficult to imagine being in a strange country, sick and alone, and not understanding what is said. When a social worker called us to arrange housing, we met a listless man in a lot of pain. Although surgery had removed all the infection that could be found, he required a second operation to clean out his abdomen again. (And today we learned he must have a third surgery!) When we visited Jesus, he was scared and depressed -- "No one cares about poor Mexicans," he exclaimed. Of course people do care, but almost no one could speak Spanish and he was very, very ill.

With the help of some confirmation students from the University (of Texas) Catholic Center, we prepared our isolation room for Jesús -- the students scrubbed the entire room and arranged the furniture for him.

So when Jesus comes to our House, he will enjoy the best we have to offer. Already he has met two of our priest friends, and Suzette, who lives in Austin after working in the New York Catholic Worker for a few years. Really, we can do little except visit Jesus and comfort him, bringing mangoes, limes, and other fruits to him, and praying. We are repaid a thousand times over with smiles and flowery speeches.

Nevertheless, Jesus is not out of the woods yet. He needs your prayers and good wishes as he gains strength to come to Mary House.

It stuns the mind to imagine someone going through so much hardship simply to have the opportunity to work. Although Jesus is lonely here, it is certain that he would have died for lack of care at home. "My ways are not your ways," says the Lord.

As I write this, Jack, our 70-year-old guest with retardation and psychosis, is down the street with all of our wastebaskets and a rake, cleaning the neighbors' yards whether they like it or not! Jack has taken away

all of our potting soil and mulch, lost a couple more shovels, and given our flower and vegetable seeds to LadyBird, our young African Gray parrot. And all this in just 4 hours!

Without a doubt, Jack was in danger living in the downtown shelters. Then he got pneumonia, and needed to be in a cleaner, more stable environment. Only then did the clinic social worker think to call us. Jack lives with us because he cannot remember if he was born in 1935 or 1936, has no identification, and cannot remember his social security number. It is certain that his disabilities have been long-standing, but without that SSN he simply is a nonperson! He has no money and he has no legal standing until we discover that number!

We are delighted to have Jack with us, although he requires constant monitoring. The police and the local mental health/mental retardation program are investigating and, slowly, information is coming to light. Pepper, Kendra, and I are hopeful that Jack can be placed in a little more controlled environment, due to Jack's tendency to wander off -- with our much needed property (clothes, kitchenware, tools, etc.) It simply is not safe for him to cross a busy street so he can sweep the enormous parking lot in front of a nearby grocery store. We worry, too, about unscrupulous people taking advantage of Jack, by taking his money or asking him to carry drugs.

Jack gets confused and agitated when he sees piles of donated clothes or food, which is a daily spectacle as our benefactors offer these gifts. He then tries to create order in ways that we cannot fathom. Tonight all of our plates and kitchen knives are missing -- we know we will find them in the daylight, probably in a nearby yard.

I am reminded of our friend and guest, Norman, who at 84 years old, was dying and could not prove he was an American citizen. Mary House was the only place who would take him. Norman had been born to missionary parents in South Africa who disappeared in the jungle one day. At the age of four years, Norman was adopted by a second family, who never bothered to formalize the proceedings. Although Norman clearly was reared in this country and knew nothing of any other culture, he legally was a noncitizen until the day he died in the safety and comfort of Mary House.

An ex-guest, Kendra, has come back to work with us, and she has brought her 14-year-old daughter with her. Kendra is a graphic artist, a cosmetologist, and a wonderful mother. Her gifts have endeared her to all our guests, and Pepper and I are grateful for the help!

Our small CW community is grateful for the opportunity to serve the many Jesuses that come our way. Thanks to all you who read this for only through your gifts of prayers, presence and presents is this work possible. Thank you and thank God!

-- Lynn Goodman-Strauss

AROUND THE HOUSE

The last 3 months of 2005 brought us four hospice guests, including Robert, who died December 27, four days after his 49th birthday. Robert arrived only after he had used all his disability money on motels and crack, his first words, spoken in tears, were, "I hope you don't think that I am a bad person because I have AIDS." Our work with Robert over the next 17 days was clear: we would love him as a celebration of how very much God loves him. Robert had been utterly rejected by his entire family and was about as alone as any one person could be.

In those few days, Robert went through all the stages of dying: denial, anger, rage, then serene acceptance as he moved toward his new life. We were with him through it all, and when he finally died, Robert was peaceful and even seemed happy.

We often remind people that dying is a process, not an event, for most of us. It is such a great honor to share this part of living with our hospice guests. Their faith and hope teach us to savor life more fully, to await our own end with hope and courage. I only hope I die as well as our homeless, lonely, and destitute guests. They are gifted teachers.

Ralph, our longtime (2 years) guest built himself a fabulous bike and left for New Orleans just after Christmas to help in the reconstruction of that great city. We continue to be amazed at the many talents of this young man as he embarks on his new adventures.

This past Christmas was unusual in that almost all of our guests left Mary House. One guest left unconscious in an ambulance--the first person ever to overdose at our House of Hospitality. Please pray for him, as he is confused and alone, trying to figure out how in the world he ended up on the streets and lost all of his belongings. When someone is under the influence of street drugs all the time, all the explaining and cajoling in the world cannot help until the individual decides that they have reached their bottom. He needs *your* prayers and ours.

The holiday season reminds us that God loves our guests so much through the many gifts and services we receive from the faith communities of Austin. Once again, Holy Family Home School Association filled large zippered bags of toiletries, socks, hat, gloves, sewing kits, and first aid kits for our friends on the street; our friend, Robert, gave us lots of sleeping bags; St. Catherine of Siena gave wrapped gifts of blankets, flannel shirts, women's toiletries and gifts, and nice hats and gloves. St. Austin's parish gave us three hams, which we shared on the street.

On New Year's Day, parishioners from St. John Vianney in Round Rock threw a party on the streets; it was by all accounts the social event of the season as blankets, sox, food, toiletries, and bottled water were

distributed in abundance. There was so much bounty that these good people had many blankets left over to give to the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless. They say they will return the Saturday after Easter with Easter eggs and other goodies.

Since the Cantas Soup Kitchen was closed on January 1, we returned in the evening with our annual meal of greens, cornbread, and black-eyed peas. It is a great way to start the year with our friends.

Too rarely do we thank our regular volunteers. Robert McClellan has been a faithful servant to our guests since the beginning of our community, supplying food, medications, and clothes/bedrolls weekly. Dorothy Day says that we have the "Duty of Delight" when we offer our small Works of Mercy. Robert is a cheerful giver. All too often he shows up with a much needed item, a sign that God knows our needs even before we do. Thanks, Bob!

When 4000 people from New Orleans showed up at Austin's Convention Center on September 5, many Austinites helped in heroic ways. On September 13, however, Homeland Security finally showed up -- and plunged hundreds of volunteers into a bureaucratic nightmare! Alcoholics Anonymous members, who had been working around the clock, were no longer admitted to work because they needed a letter from the "Director" of AA! (They went on to volunteer for other jobs.)

Peter and Mara from the Tacoma Catholic Worker arrived in Austin on a prearranged visit just in time to go with Lynn to the Center. We were assigned to work in the Dispensary, a sort of drugstore for every toiletry and cleaning item available. We also distributed underwear. Meanwhile, Pepper stayed home to serve our patients. Our main job was to listen, however. Everyone, including children, had witnessed horrific destruction and death, and everyone wanted to talk about it. We talked and prayed with people who had lost every single thing. The Church had offered a strong presence to the newcomers, and it was a comfort to us as well. Listening is difficult when all you hear about is tragedy and mayhem.

Many people ask if we have any Hurricane Katrina evacuees living at Mary House. Well, three people have been referred to us, but each person refused to stay at here! These middle class people could not bear the idea of living in such cramped circumstances with men and women from the street. And, of course, with their disabilities, our new friends received much better accommodation through the government.

This is a reminder to us all that life is difficult for men and women in such reduced circumstances. Although Mary House is by far the best shelter in Austin (we even give our guests allowances!), it still is a shelter, with curfews and rules and sometimes difficult roommates. What patience and courage our house guests have!



JEREMIAH'S STUTTER

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ORDINARY TIME

2006

RADICAL CHRISTIANITY

Certain assumptions about Catholic Workers are made regarding our relationship with the Roman Catholic Community. These assumptions seem to be predicated upon the mindset of the person making them rather than any objective evidence.

Although some of our Houses are not particularly (Roman) Catholic, it also is true that the practice of the Works of Mercy stems from Catholic Social Teaching, usually in the form of Encyclicals, which are based on Scripture. The Catholic Church sees itself as "in the World", as a guide and inspiration of Christian people, with special emphasis on the Bible. Thus our concern about injustice and poverty.

In practical terms, the Church should be concerned with the poor people of the world, for She consistently has allied herself with government and business interests in Europe, and later, the Americas and Asia. In the Americas, Spanish missionaries instituted the *encomienda* system of slavery for forcibly baptized Indians. Many bishops have allied themselves with dictators who enrich themselves on the backs of the poor, often sharing in the largesse as they live in palaces and enjoy the benefits of wealth.

This explains exactly why so many Catholics to this day live in destitution and ignorance. But the Church, hierarchical and lay, also knows about redemption and repentance and atonement (penance). We Catholics spend huge amounts of money on behalf of victims of war, greed, and natural disasters. It is not enough, of course, and the hierarchy worldwide has been diffident at best when confronting local systemic injustices.

Dorothy Day, herself a devout and orthodox Catholic, wrote of the "scandal" the Church shows itself to be. I, like Mary at the Tomb of Jesus, find myself saying, "*They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where to find Him,*" when I hear of Bishops who refuse communion to politicians of differing parties, or when the hierarchy of a country ruled by dictators ally themselves with those who would murder, rape, and pillage their poorest citizens. It is easy to remember that I, too, am a sinner, contributing to the world's misery through my dependence on oil and other habits. My confessor often reminded me that Peter was the first Pope and a royal pain to Our Lord at once, serving as the prime example of human frailty transformed by God's will through grace and love.

For several decades, I was imbued with the notion of a corporate-inspired net of social services administered by the State. The War on Poverty quickly became a quagmire of paperwork, theories of highly educated social scientists, practitioners who never had been poor or marginalized in any way and soaring administrative costs. It quickly became apparent that the clients were not receiving the money for social services -- the salaries of caseworkers and bureaucrats did and do!

In 2003-4, the Federal Government mandated that all cities with homeless populations form Committees of homeless advocates to end homelessness in ten years. Austin Catholic Workers opted not to attend most of these meetings, as no homeless people would be invited to share their

experience, strength, and hope.

When I went to the third to last meeting in the hope that housing would be discussed, I discovered this was not to be! Until the last twenty minutes, when I asked all those directors of homeless agencies about housing, the talk was focused entirely on how to get money for more *caseworkers*! The reaction to my queries was similar to the reaction I would have received had I urinated on the floor! (We did not return.) Literally billions of taxpayer dollars have been spent on homeless agencies and programs, but people are still homeless! I like to think how many housing units, including real houses all those billions of tax dollars could have purchased. Now, Jesus offers us the solution to all this: end hunger by feeding the hungry, end thirst by offering water, end isolation and homelessness by welcoming the stranger, visiting the prisoner, and comforting the sick, end nakedness by offering clothing. And He tells us that, at the final Judgment, those of us who did these Works of Mercy would be with Him in heaven, and those who did not do them would be cast aside. (He did NOT mention homosexual marriage, abortion, or even premarital sex as criteria!) Love requires direct action. The solution to homelessness is homes, not paper pushers and theorists and meetings and programs with lots of employees.

Pepper often says that Faith is a verb, not a noun. If we lived as Jesus did, we would not engage in violence, not even war. We would share and we would love everyone everywhere. The Kingdom of God, Jesus said in Matthew 25, exists whenever we do these things for the least of our brothers and sisters. Faith without works is dead.

The root (from *radix*, meaning root in Latin, which gives birth to the English *radical*) of our faith lies in the life and death of Our Lord. The most radical, fundamental acts of love are the most practical and the most difficult to perform in a world of computers and theorists and books and corporate modeling. How tragic that the richest country in the history of the world will not feed, clothe, and house the very poorest among us. How very unchristian it is to reduce these needs to political battles. How very basic, i.e., radical, are the Works of Mercy. I surely hope and pray that all Christians are radical!

It is difficult to be a Christian in this society. Politicians who claim to be good Christians are promoting legislation which would prevent people of faith from giving food, water, clothing and shelter to our immigrant brethren who are undocumented. American bishops have defied these politicians, affirming our prophetic calling to serve each other. Abortion is not the only way to end human life. Life does not end at birth. Two dangerous situations concern us and we must speak out.

(1) You read the story of Jesus in the first issue of the year. He lives with us now, still pretty sick. Brackenridge clinics refuse to reverse his colostomy because it is not necessary to save his life anymore. Jesus' wife is going blind in Mexico and he cannot return because medical care, even colostomy bags, is not available to the very poor. Every poor person faces healthcare challenges in Austin. Read on about only one of the horror stories. The young man's voice was frantic when he was referred to us by the

RADICAL CHRISTIANITY, Continued

Diocese on a Friday afternoon. A lapsed Catholic, Tim had called "the Catholic Church" because, he said, he knows our faith community cares about human life. His story was so bizarre that I thought he surely did not have correct information. Six days previously Tim and the swim team he coached had rescued a homeless victim of a vicious sexual assault. Tim claimed that Angela was to be discharged that very day, without meds, in great pain and constipated, and without street clothes because the police had taken hers for evidence. She was to be discharged with serious injuries, including, amongst other injuries, two broken arms, a broken back, and a deep laceration where she had been impaled on a small tree when she jumped off a cliff to escape being shot!

All of Austin knew of the crime and heroic rescue, as the media had reported this crime for a couple of days. When I arrived at Brackenridge, our public hospital and the regional trauma center, late that Friday afternoon, it was clear that everything Tim said, and more, was absolutely true. After speaking to Angela's doctor, I realized the only way to get Angela the help she needed was to go to the press. So I informed the director of Brackenridge that a photographer would be at the door as Angela and I were being arrested for trespass if Angela were discharged. Two minutes later, the director of the Trauma Unit and a social worker appeared in Angela's room – to ask us what they could do to keep the press away.

Five days later, Angela could eat, was free of pain, had her meds, was able to walk with special crutch, and had follow-up appointments at specialty clinics. We brought her to Mary House but had to return to Brackenridge Hospital twice – Angela almost lost her leg to infection and hospital personnel refused to allow a second opinion. When she was discharged a third time without antibiotics with a ten-inch long, five-inch deep wound oozing green pus, we appealed to a Catholic surgeon friend who informed us that the standard treatment of such wounds was exactly the opposite of the "care" she had received. He saved her leg.

This and other egregious incidents – including those with paying patients -- are paid for by our tax dollars. (It cost three times as much to NOT care for Angela than if her medical needs had been addressed the first five days.)

Guess who administers Brackenridge? The Daughters of Charity, who own and operate the most profitable healthcare system in the country, including a large local – and competing – system! The good sisters profess no responsibility or interest in this situation per their vice president for local healthcare. You do not have to go to México to die of neglect.

(2) We discovered that women in Austin are protected neither by the Austin Police nor SafePlace, Austin's center for victims of domestic violence. Again, OUR tax dollars pay for salaries – and a huge apartment complex next door to SafePlace, Grove Place, which was built with OUR money for victims of violence and abuse. SafePlace is very proud of its complex and assures its clients of their safety.

Kendra, our third Catholic Worker, was forced to move from Grove Place into Mary House with her 14-year-old daughter after several years of stalking. Kendra had been a guest of Mary House after several years of poor health were followed by years spent caring for her terminally ill father, mother and fiancé. Only Kendra, out of six children cared for

their parents. Kendra's mother still lives in great pain (we pray for her and beg your prayers).

Immediately after Kendra's father died, curious things began to happen. In a spurious custody case, court documents prove that Kendra's friends, under oath, testified to stalking, stealing mail, and slanderous lies about Kendra's mental health. A slanderous and perjurious affidavit, claiming that she is a prostitute who deals, uses, and manufactures drugs was signed under oath by a brother in another county in an effort to bolster a plea for change of custody. (One judge rebuked the opposing party's attorney, another judge called the case a "vendetta".) Kendra won, although Mary House incurred a huge legal bill on her behalf which is being paid gradually by special donations.

At Grove Place, people followed Kendra onto the grounds in cars we have identified. Person/s have destroyed the furniture, professional machines and equipment, clothing, and art work in the apartment – someone entered almost every time Kendra left the complex. Investigating police officers have taken fingerprints and witnessed the damage and the fact that someone from the apartment across the breezeway literally has worn a path to her apartment through the attic. We have followed the stalkers, and Lynn has spoken with several. Photographs have been taken.

Officials of SafePlace made no real attempt to stop these crimes at Grove Place. The managers have harassed Kendra and even had her car towed from her parking place! Appeals to the SafePlace supervisor of the operation of the apartments have gone unheeded – when Kendra went to move out of Grove Place, the apartment had been robbed and items destroyed once again. Because it was not safe to be there, Kendra's lawyer requested that SafePlace move her out, that its personnel sign a statement that Kendra is not liable for the very real damage done to the carpets and counters and walls – and, even more important, that SafePlace will undertake immediate changes in security and reports of security breaches. They should do no less, for many residents are victims of domestic violence and abuse. SafePlace refused all of these requests.

The detectives responsible for investigating domestic crimes have lied to us, refused to investigate, and lied to Internal Affairs and the Police Monitor. We have given tapes of our conversations with them and all other evidence to the FBI, which is impressed by the sheer volume of our information. Tax dollars are at work in all these situations! Mary House remains in the forefront of these events as we photograph, witness, and document all this. The FBI is investigating the Police for denial of equal protection under the law, a civil rights violation.

These issues cry out for justice. We pray truth prevails. We can no longer remain silent. Ours is the voice of marginalized people, disregarded and ignored. Ours is the voice of the citizenry who pays for safety, and healthcare, expecting entirely different results.

Jesus, too, spoke Truth to Power. Like Kendra, He too was the victim of slander and theft. Like Angela, He was ignored and threatened.

At Mary House, we pray that we too, can die to self as we speak Truth to Power and grow in God's grace. Pray for us, that we may love as Jesus loves.

-- Lynn Goodman-Strauss

**When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint
When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist**

-- Dom Helder Camera, Brazil

THE REASON FOR THE SEASON!

By Lynn Goodman-Strauss, Director of Mary House Catholic Worker

In all the frantic activity of the holidays, our small Catholic Worker community frets about what we can give to our children and grandchildren. They have so many gifts, most of which will be put aside in days or weeks in lieu of other pleasures. We want to give something that reflects the Love of God Himself on the Birthday of Our Lord. Jesus was born to simplicity, generosity, and hospitality. What can we give to reflect that?

★ I especially worry about what to get for my grandchildren, for my resources are limited and those kids have just about everything they could want. Since they were very young, however, on holidays and birthdays I have "gifted" each very proud grandchild with a creature from **Heifer Project International** (www.heifer.org or 800/422-0474) a flock of chickens, a hive of bees, 1/10 of a goat, angora rabbits, and a sapling forest for investments of \$20-50! This is a great charity in every way: animal and forest gifts empower very poor people to obtain food and income as *they give the firstborn of each animal to another local household*. HPI also sends beautiful gift cards, Sunday school curricula for Jews and Christians, and even cards about the animals and plants, all free. You can even take your children/grandchildren to a working farm in Arkansas which houses each kind of animal given in all parts of the world. Or you can work with your parish to collect \$5000 for an entire Noah's Ark!

★ A donation to **Catholic Relief Services** (www.crsgifts.org or 888/277-7575) provides front-line service to people all over the world. Last year I gave \$50 to CRS on behalf of my grandchildren for weatherproof tents for 5 families in Afghanistan after the terrible winter earthquake in 2005.

★ Closer to home, the **Medical Missionary Team of the Diocese of Austin (Tñio at)** uses donations to serve the poorest of the poor in Latin American countries. In February 2007, a team will go to the jungles of the Bolivian lowlands to provide free care for people who do not even have potable water, vaccinations, or simple antiparasitic medications. **The team needs over the counter medications and cash for two trips outside the USA.**

★ To buy a more personal gift, go to **Ten Thousand Villages (1317 S. Congress)** in Austin. The staff is all volunteer, and the profit from each sale goes directly to the producer of the goods in very poor societies. Jewelry, fabrics, rugs, dishes, sculpture, and baskets are but some of the beautiful crafts available.

Each of these charities uses lots of volunteers and spends much less on overhead than similar ones, so "Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poor" (Mother Teresa) receives more benefit from your generosity. **These gifts literally give life.**

Families in particular find it difficult to emphasize the real meaning of Christmas. Even preschoolers enjoy the basics of St. Luke's story of Jesus' Birthday. Another resource could be ***The Best Christmas Pageant Ever***, a short little paperback in which unchurched children discover the real meaning of Christmas – and teach their more conventional peers who already know the Story. Even my teenagers loved this book! We read it aloud every Christmas season when they were in high school.

How about asking a church in a deprived neighborhood if they need assistance with food or clothes sorting? Or organizing friends and neighbors from church and/or home/office to collect food and clothing for the poor? Or volunteering at your local St. Vincent de Paul store? You also can adopt an elder or an entire family from the Christmas Bureau, Blue Santa, or Brown Santa organizations in your town. When you see a homeless-looking person "signing" on street corners for money, hand them instead a new pair of white cotton athletic socks or a pop top can of soup, chili, or beans, or a first aid kit, or new 54" shoestrings. The whole family can gather these items and participate together.

The point is, Christmas is about Jesus, who shared His life with poor and lonely people from his birth onward. What better way to honor Him than by giving simple and life-affirming presents to "Jesus, in the distressing disguise of the poor" (Mother Teresa)?

Below are more ideas for Christmas giving on behalf of Mary House's household. We simply do not have the resources to provide for the special gifts to become independent.

Catherine is a 49-year-old woman who has worked all of her life. Her bookkeeping job did not pay benefits, and she was in a terrible automobile accident which caused minor brain damage and major damage to one leg. She immediately lost her job, her home, and her car insurance. Catherine now receives food stamps, unemployment pay, and a city clinic card – all of which she will lose immediately if she takes a part-time job. Catherine, like most of us, did not realize that for people of limited means, there is no safety net as she becomes able to work a little. So she awaits more healing. **The need** is for car insurance, \$500 for six months' car insurance. Catherine hopes to work in early 2007.

Dennis is a 29-year old man with a serious illness which causes him to be morbidly obese. He arrived in rags, and our \$150 did not go very far towards buying clothes which will fit him. Dennis needs some big, big clothes to work in – his doctors just cleared him for part-time work. **The need** is for \$300 worth of clothing from the Casual Male store.

Kendra is a single mother with disabilities and illnesses which prevent her from working outside the home. However, her very gifted daughter requires transportation to various school events. **The need** is for \$700 for 12 months' car insurance. Kendra also is a graphic artist whose portfolio was destroyed by whoever has stolen and damaged everything else she owns. **The need** is for gift cards to Hobby Lobby or Miller BluePrint so she can produce items to sell. **Kendra's 15 year old daughter** needs a printer for the laptop PC we bought for her, money for going out with her friends, and some clothing.

Thomas and his big sister Laura live with their mother and assorted other relatives in the worst housing project in Austin. Thomas is a newborn and Laura is 10. Thomas really needs anything at all for a baby; Laura needs movie tickets and art supplies. **The need is** for baby things, gift cards to Hobby Lobby, educational toys for both children.

Jesús arrived in Austin to work with a ruptured appendix. The third day here Jesús became gravely ill and almost died. Because he is undocumented, Mary House is the only place he could safely go – we give him an isolation room for his year's recovery time. Jesús tries to help around Mary House, but he is counting the days till he can return to Mexico. His wife is going blind from glaucoma, and he worries about their five children not having their father in their lives. When Jesús returns to his home in central México, he will return to a place of no jobs, desert land, and hungry family members. Mary House has a dream, though, to furnish him with materials to build a chicken coop, chickens to raise for meat and for sale, a couple of goats for milk for the children and to produce more goats for sale; and some bees. **The need** is for \$4000 to create a way for his family to work and eat.

St. Vincent de Paul said that if a man receives a fish, he eats for a day; if a man is taught to fish, he eats for a lifetime. Every single gift we request for all these people will provide the means to "fish for a lifetime". Won't you help to provide a step toward that independence for these people?

Mary House, too, has some special requests. A wonderful Toyota sedan which served our guests as we took them to various (and many) appointments was vandalized and died a horrible death. Our urgent need for a car made it necessary, for the first time in our fifteen years, to purchase an automobile. **The need** is for **\$10,000**, payable in **\$350.00 car payments**.

Mary House incurred a debt of \$12,000 for legal services on behalf of family unity for Kendra and her daughter. Special donations have whittled it down to \$9,000. **The need** is to pay the attorney, who did much more work than he charged for, a **\$9,000 balance**.

Every penny we receive from you, and most of the money we community members personally receive from anyone, goes to serve our guests. All gifts are tax deductible. Checks should be made out to **Mary House Catholic Worker** with a notation below naming the recipient.

Mary House Catholic Worker P O Box 684185 Austin, TX 78768-4185 512/447-0963

WHO OR WHAT IS MARY HOUSE CATHOLIC WORKER????

WE ARE an intentional community of lay Christians who live in the tradition of the Catholic Worker founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin during the Great Depression in 1933. True to our roots, we are not paid for our work, nor do we accept funds from taxing authorities or large business corporations. The Sacred Writings of the Judeo-Christian Bible and Catholic Social Teaching inform our work and our rule for life, which is framed by the Works of Mercy (Mt. 25 and the Beatitudes).

Due to changes in the tax laws, we are tax exempt, thus relieving ourselves and our donors of the burden of being taxed on money given to the poor rather than to the government (i.e. if we were not exempt, YOU would pay taxes on any donations). The Catholic Worker is supported by donations from individuals and faith communities through prayer, presence, and sharing of small amounts of money, discarded clothing, blankets and sheets, furniture, shoes, travel toiletries, new athletic socks, etc. Mary House is the ONLY free shelter available in Central Texas for homeless men and women with terminal, chronic, short- or long-term illnesses or injuries. We also offer cold-weather shelters on freezing nights and share necessities with homeless psychiatric patients in local hospitals.

In 2006 our community consists of Lynn Goodman-Strauss, Pepper Hoops, and Kendra Dale, a parrot, 6 cats, and up to 12 very sick guests. **Board Members** include Most Rev. John McCarthy, ex officio, John Minor, Jennifer Long, Will McDonald, Randy Delgado, Sr. Mary William Sullivan, DC, David Breser, and Cornelia Moore.

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY To Feed the Hungry, To Give Drink to the Thirsty, To Clothe the Naked, To Welcome the Stranger, To Comfort the Sick, To Visit the Prisoner, To Bury the Dead. **SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY** To Pray for the Living and the Dead, To Bear Wrongs Patiently, To Comfort the Afflicted, To Admonish Sinners, To Instruct the Ignorant, To Counsel the Doubtful, To Forgive Offenses.

2006 Calendar for Mary House Catholic Worker of Austin, Inc.

P.O. BOX 684185 AUSTIN, TX 78768-4185 512/447-0963

Daily Offerings	24/7	Hospitality at Mary House	Call to visit, volunteer, etc
Monthly Offering	7 p.m. 2nd Wed	Liturgy and Potluck	Mary House
Intermittent Offerings	Jeremiah's Stutter	at least 3 issues in 2006	
	7 p.m. -- 7 a.m.	Shelters on some freezing nights	Call for information
	some afternoons	fruit distribution on downtown streets	
Annual Offerings	Jan 1	10 a.m. Feast Day of Our Lady	
	Jan 16	9:30 a.m. Birthday Party, MHCW and MLK	
	March 19 7 a.m.	Feast Day of St. Joseph the Wkr	
	April 14	9:15 a.m. Good Friday Dntr Stations of + 10th/Guadalupe	
	Summer	Downtown Birthday Party for Jesus	
	Weekend Before Labor Day	Workers' Party and Feast	
	Thanksgiving	Downtown Meal	
	Christmas Eve Day	Birthday Party for Jesus in two psychiatric facilities for homeless people	

A simple meditation: *Let nothing upset you, Let nothing frighten you. Everything is changing. God alone is changeless. Patience attains the goal. Who has God lacks nothing, God alone fills all our needs.* --Saint Teresa of Avila

Our favorite bumper sticker these days: **For God So Loved the World He Did Not Send a Committee**

Mary House Catholic Worker Requests: Prayers, Adult Multivitamins (*in date, please*), new, white athletic socks, gardeners and painters, jars of crunchy and smooth peanut butter, **money** -- those electric bills are soaring with the need to keep indoor temperatures comfortable for very sick people -- men's and women's underwear, very large clothing, clothes for men and women, flannel or knit twin sheets and **new pillows!** All of our pillows are worn and flat from much use and much washing. We beg 12-15 brand new, non-allergenic pillows, please. Very sick guests use pillows to arrange painful joints.

Mary House operates on a budget of less than \$55,000/year. We serve more than 100 guests a year and feed 60-100 folks on the street. The cost of transportation, food, medication, housing, and 24/7 presence of our community is **less than \$500/House guest!** We beg you to be generous to our guests. \$100 goes a really long way as we Welcome the Stranger and Comfort the Sick, etc. We are so grateful to the people of faith who give us this house and all the resources to create and sustain Mary House. Our community remembers you daily in our prayers of blessing and thanksgiving.

\$10 pays for 10 pounds of fresh, good fruit to give to people without access to much fresh food on the street.

\$100 pays for almost 100 days of the cost for one bed (mortgage only). (We have 12 beds, 365 days a year!)

\$1000 pays for a month's worth of electricity/water, or half a month's food for the House, or 2 months' food for the street.

\$10000 pays off one tenth of Mary House's debt on the House note.

We beg you to be generous on behalf of our guests, and we pray your generosity will allow us to pay off Mary House's mortgage and allow us to purchase a second building nearby for working poor people to live in a coop environment.

COMING SOON TO A NATIVITY SCENE NEAR YOU... JESUS IN THE DISTRESSING DISGUISE OF THE POOR!!

Have you ever wanted to make a difference in this world of sin and woe? Almost to a person, our friends and benefactors tell us that the Catholic Worker is a community of workers on behalf of the poor. Well, that simply is not true! Catholic Workers also assist all of us who are rich – we who live in homes. The Works of Mercy are incumbent upon all Christians. So we are careful to provide opportunities to Feed the Hungry, Give Drink to the Thirsty, etc.

This is the last chance readers will have to learn of opportunities to celebrate the God Who Comes Among Us during the holiday season. We always have a *Stutter* for the holidays but it is too late for readers to do much of anything in their hectic lives.

Nov 1- December 22 Mary House collects turkeys/hams/canned yams/ **fresh** fruits and vegetables for our guests in and outside of Mary House. **HEB cards are helpful as well. We feed many folks.**

Nov 23 - December 23 Mary House volunteers distribute free Christmas cards to our guests on the streets and pay for the postage. **Stamps and volunteers to distribute these cards are needed. NO CHRISTMAS CARDS, PLEASE -- WE HAVE LOTS!**

Advent

Mary House requests that families and communities of faith collect **toiletries, phone cards, gift certificates to movie theaters & fast food joints, packages of underwear for both genders, BACKPACKS, ladies' makeup and toiletries, used and new blankets, especially including flannel lap blankets, flannel shirts, ladies' new or gently used warm wear, white athletic sox, Ramen noodles, and lots of cans of microwaveable food. Boxes of small envelopes of antibacterial ointment are desperately needed.**

Mary House does NOT want Christmas trees, tinsel, or decorations, thank you. **House guests love poinsettias and boxes of microwave popcorn, including Caramel – no butter or salt flavors, please. Homemade tamales (no beef, please) or money for a night out at a restaurant for all the members of the household during Christmas are greatly treasured by our guests. Rosaries and Bibles, costume jewelry and other accessories (purses, wallets, shoes and jackets) are welcomed by all. Visitors to share meals, especially holiday meals, and to visit and watch a dvd or play a board game always are welcome!**

Mary House proper is seeking donations of **turkey bucks, & gift cards to Whole Foods and Sun Harvest**, so we can purchase healthy and hard-to-find oils and other foods. **HUGE non aluminum, non teflon pans for cooking soups and casseroles** are requested for cooking for special diets.

Christmas

Homeless people in psychiatric hospitals receive our gifts of food and **Birthday Cakes**

Jan 1

Feast Day of Our Lady Mary House feeds New Year's food on the street. We offer a party with gifts of **toiletries, clothing and blankets** to celebrate Life.

MARY HOUSE CATHOLIC WORKER of Austin, Inc

P O Box 684185

Austin, TX 78768-4185

TO:

Mary House Catholic Worker of Austin celebrated 15 years of service January 15!
Thanks to each of you whose prayers, presence, and presents made this possible!